

Message Text

SECRET

PAGE 01 TEHRAN 02293 110816 Z

12

ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ADP-00 SSO-00 CCO-00 NSCE-00 /026 W

----- 035857

O P 110735 Z APR 73

FM AMEMBASSY TEHRAN

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1798

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY JIDDA IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY KUWAIT IMMEDIATE

SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY

USCINCEUR PRIORITY

S E C R E T TEHRAN 2293

EXDIS

E. O. 11652: XGDS-1

TAGS: MASS, KU

SUBJ: KUWAIT REQUEST FOR U. S. ASSISTANCE

REF: KUWAIT 1147

SUMMARY: IT MAY BE USEFUL TO RECALL THAT FIRST TIME IRAQ PUBLICLY THREATENED KUWAIT IN 1961 SURPRISINGLY DECISIVE ACTION BY USUALLY FECKLESS ARAB LEAGUE CAUSED IRAQ TO BACK DOWN. REQUEST FOR ACTION: THAT DEPARTMENTENO CONSIDER SUGGESTING TO KUWAIT THAT, AMONG VARIOUS CONTINGENCIES IT MIGHT EXAMINE TO COUNTER PRESENT IRAQI THREAT, IT MIGHT LOOK TO ARAB LEAGUE. END SUMMARY

1. IN CURRENT CIRCUMSTANCES OF SERIOUS IRAQI THREAT TO TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY OF KUWAIT (REFTEL), IT MAY BE USEFUL TO REVIEW CRISIS OF MAY - JUNE OF 1961 WHEN THEN IRAQI STRONGMAN ABDUL KARIM KASSEM LAID PUBLIC CLAIM TO KUWAIT AS A PART OF IRAQI TERRITORY. SERIOUS CRISIS BLEW UP IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING KASSEM' S SPEECH AND BRITISH FORCES WHICH HAD ONLY RECENTLY EVACUATED KUWAIT RETURNED TO THAT COUNTRY AT REQUEST OF SHEIKH OF KUWAIT. THIS CONSTITUTED SERIOUS EMBARRASSMENT FOR BOTH BRITAIN AND KUWAIT WHICH WAS THEN IN PROCESS OF BEING READIED FOR INDEPENDENCE.

2. IN SEEKING SOME VIABLE ALTERNATIVE TO RELYING ON THE FORMER
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COLONIALIST POWER, BRITAIN, FOR ITS SECURITY, KUWAIT ASKED ARAB LEAGUE TO STEP IN. RESULT WAS THAT BRITISH FORCES WITHDREW AND MILITARY FORCES FROM ARAB LEAGUE COUNTRIES, PRIMARILY FROM SAUDI ARABIA AND JORDAN, MOVED IN. MINOC UNITS FROM SEVERAL OTHER ARAB

COUNTRIES AND TOKEN FORCES FROM EGYPT WERE INCLUDED. SYMBOLIC EGYPTIAN SUPPORT FOR KUWAIT'S INDEPENDENCE PLUS SUBSTANTIAL MILITARY FORCES FROM JORDAN AND SAUDI ARABIA CAUSED IRAQ, WHICH DUE TO INTERNAL FACTORS IS PECULIARLY SENSITIVE TO CAIRO, TO BACK DOWN. KASSEM DID NOT EXPLICITLY RENOUNCE HIS CLAIM BUT HE TACITLY ALLOWED IT TO LAPSE AND ARAB LEAGUE FORCES WITHDREW.

3. SEEMING ADVANTAGES OF THE ARAB LEAGUE ROUTE ARE (A) KUWAIT'S FAVORABLE EARLIER EXPERIENCE WITH IT; (B) AN ALL- ARAB UMBRELLA OF PROTECTION FOR ARAB KUWAIT WOULD SEEM BEST CALCULATED TO PACK THE MAXIMUM PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT IN BAGHDAD (WE ARE ASSUMING THAT EGYPT COULD HARDLY REFUSE TO GO ALONG IN VIEW OF \$100 MILLION PLUS KUWAIT SUBSIDY GOING ANNUALLY TO CAIRO); AND (C) JOINT ARAB LEAGUE MANIFESTO OF SUPPORT FOR KUWAIT MIGHT WELL BE SUFFICIENT TO CAUSE BAGHDAD TO BACK DOWN WITHOUT ACTUALLY MOVING ONE SOLDIER TO KUWAIT. THUS POSSIBILITY THAT MILITARY FORCES FROM IRAN, JODRAN AND SAUDI ARABIA MIGHT ACTUALLY HAVE TO INTERVENE IN KUWAIT WOULD HAVE BEEN OBIATED AND WITH IT ULTIMATE CONSEQUENCES DIFFICULT TO FORESEE. AND, IN ANY CASE, IF IRAQI HAWKS WERE UNDETERRED BY UNITED ARAB FRONT OF OPPOSITION, THEY WOULD BE IN POOR POSITION TO MUSTER ANY INTERNATIONAL SUPPORT IF FORCE, FROM WHATEVER DIRECTION, ULTIMATELY HAD TO BE USED AGAINST THEM.

4. IN ADVANCING ARAB LEAGUE ROUTE AS A POSSIBILITY THAT KUWAIT MIGHT WISH TO CONSIDER, WE ARE NOT OVERLOOKING FACT THAT TEHRAN IS TRADITIONALLY COLD TO EGYPT PLAYING ANY MEDIATORY ROLE IN PERSIAN GULF CONTEXT, OR THAT WE MIGHT SEEM THEREBY TO BE PULLING IN NON- LITTORAL STATE IN GULF DISPUTE, IN VIOLATION OF GENERWL PROPOSITION THAT SUCH DISPUTES ARE BEST LEFT FOR LITTORAL STATES THEMSELVES TO RESOLVE. BUT WE BELIEVE POSSIBLE TEHRAN OBJECTIONS WOULD BE OF MANAGEABLE PROPORTIONS IN VIEW FACT THAT (A) CURRENT RELATIONS BETWEEN TEHRAN AND CAIRO ARE GOOD AND (B) AN EGYPTIAN ROLE IN THE CURRENT CONTEXT WOULD BE CONSTRUCTIVE AND NOT OF THE MEDDLING NATURE THAT SOMETIMES CHARACTERIZED EGYPTIAN ACTIONS IN THIS AREA SOME YEARS AGO.

HELMS

SECRET

*** Current Handling Restrictions *** EXDIS

*** Current Classification *** SECRET

Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: Z
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: n/a
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 11 APR 1973
Decaption Date: 28 MAY 2004
Decaption Note: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: golinofr
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1973TEHRAN02293
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: RR
Errors: n/a
Film Number: n/a
From: TEHRAN
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1973/newtext/t19730439/aaaaiela.tel
Line Count: 109
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE
Office: ACTION SS
Original Classification: SECRET
Original Handling Restrictions: EXDIS
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators:
Previous Classification: SECRET
Previous Handling Restrictions: EXDIS
Reference: 73 KUWAIT 1147
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: golinofr
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 20 DEC 2001
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <20-Dec-2001 by shawdg>; APPROVED <09-Jan-2002 by golinofr>
Review Markings:

Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
30 JUN 2005

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: <DBA CORRECTED> gwr 971222
Subject: KUWAIT REQUEST FOR U. S. ASSISTANCE
TAGS: MASS, KU
To: AMMAN
JIDDA
KUWAIT
SECSTATE WASHDC
SS
USCINCEUR
WASHDC

Type: TE

Markings: Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 30 JUN 2005